

The Tabernacle Fulfilled in Christ

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Hebrews 9:1-14
Preached on: Sunday, March 26, 2017

It is a privilege we should never underestimate when we have an opportunity to come before the Lord our God who is in our presence right now and open up the word that he has given to us, the revelation of himself. So will you take your Bibles and turn to Hebrews 9. We will be looking at the first 14 verses this morning as we continue to make our way verse by verse through this amazing epistle and I have entitled my discourse to you this morning "The Tabernacle Fulfilled in Christ."

Here we continue to examine the inspired writer's extended argument pertaining to the supremacy of Christ and the superiority of the new covenant over the old. Now, bear in mind this is a very important work of apologetics written to Jewish Christians and some who were borderline believers who for fear of persecution were tempted to return once again to Judaism, and undoubtedly they were bombarded by their friends and those leaders within the Jewish circles, that they needed to leave this Christian cult and they were given all kinds of arguments as to why it was phony etc. So the arguments that are given here under the inspiration of this author, are very very important to them.

Now, I must confess that there are some sections of Hebrews that are very hard to preach and this is one of those sections because the entire epistle is an argument written to Jews that contrast the Old Testament with the New, and most believers today, I would submit that probably most of you, have very little understanding or background in the Old Testament. You know very little about the covenants, the Mosaic law, the Levitical priesthood, the tabernacle that later became the temple, the feasts, the convocations, the rituals, all the symbolism associated with those things, because all of that is foreign to our culture and in many ways it is foreign to our theology and to our worship. So it's very easy to lose people and sometimes as I'm preaching, I look out and I can see that I have lost some of you. Moreover, Hebrews is filled with deep profound doctrinal truths. Folks, what we're into now is meat, it's not milk. Baby Christians are going to struggle with this. They will struggle with both understanding what is being said and applying it, and worldly Christians are going to be bored out of their mind, and it's my great task by the power of the Spirit to somehow make these truths appealing and chewable to those that have no teeth, so to speak, these great doctrines pertaining to the atoning work of Christ and the unfathomable blessings that belong to all who are his through faith by his grace.

Now, as we come to the first 14 verses of chapter 9, the Holy Spirit is really going to arrest our attention under, I believe, two primary categories that we will look at this morning. 1. The symbolic structure of the tabernacle, and then, secondly, the symbolic service of the tabernacle. And with this, he paints a masterpiece pertaining to the high

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priestly work of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the symbolism of the tabernacle, he really animates our imagination and he penetrates our very soul with some most fundamental truths, primarily the fact that every man is born to know God. We are all created to have communion with our Creator and to live for his glory. This is the reason for our very existence and we will see this in this text this morning, but because of sin, we are by nature indifferent to God, we are hostile to God, we live in rebellion against God therefore we are alienated from God therefore we cannot approach a holy God. We just sung about that in a variety of the lyrics that we sang a few minutes ago. Therefore since we cannot approach a holy God, someone needs to help us get into his presence. We are unable to do it on our own. There is a desperate need that we have therefore for a mediator who will help us be reconciled to the God we have offended, a priest who will help us gain access to God, and all the magnificent realities that God established in the Mosaic covenant were mere shadows that pointed to the ultimate and eternal reality that would one day come in the high priestly work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Folks, Jesus is our faithful high priest.

So as we examine the profound symbolism of the structure and the service of the tabernacle, know that this is God's way of revealing to us the supremacy and glory of our great high priest that he has provided for us in his marvelous love. And here God reveals how the old sanctuary and the ritual sacrifices of the priests and the ceremonies of the day of atonement really offered no effective remedy for sin and did nothing to assuage the gnawing pain of a guilty conscience, whereas the work of Christ permanently and perfectly does both.

So let's look, first of all, at the symbolic structure of the tabernacle, God's dwelling place on earth during that time. Verse 1 of chapter 9, he began saying,

1 Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary.

Now, let's stop there. Here we can see, first of all, that God is a God of order and worshiping him is to be done with order and with reverence, and he insists upon, for example, precise theology. And so we know that he gave detailed instructions about the structure of the tabernacle and how he was to be worshiped. It's interesting if you look in Scripture, you will see there are two chapters that he devotes to creation and over 50 that he devotes to the tabernacle and the way he is to be approached in worship. He tells us in so many passages the what, the why, the where, the how of what the priests were to do and what the worshipers were to do. He even told them how the 12 tribes of Israel were to be encamped around the tabernacle so that they could all face the tabernacle and see God's presence among them. And this was very important because all of these things

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pictured the coming Messiah and his atoning work, so naturally the precision of all of these things is extremely important.

Now, the tabernacle was really a movable tent that had three main parts: a courtyard, the holy place, and then behind that the most holy place, sometimes called the Holy of Holies, and thousands of tents of the 12 tribes would be erected symmetrically around it so that they could all face the tabernacle and see the glorious cloud of God's presence rising from the most holy place. This is a time when the word "awesome" can appropriately be used, okay? You laugh at that. That word is so overly used and misused today it doesn't mean anything but, folks, if you were there and you would have seen that, you would have said, "That is awesome!"

Now, in verses 2 through 5, the writer describes the layout and the furnishings and he's doing this in order to remind his audience of what the old looked like so that he could compare it with the superior new. So notice what he says in verse 2,

2 For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the sacred bread; this is called the holy place.
3 Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, 4 having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; 5 and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail.

Now, I think the best way to approach this is for me to explain what God has revealed in his word regarding the structure of the tabernacle and some of the symbolism that is behind it. So let me do that now. The tabernacle courtyard was 150 by 75 feet. If you are familiar with our Family Life Center, that is 50 by 100, so you can tell that the courtyard itself would have been larger. It would have been 150, so half again bigger than our Family Life Center. And it was enclosed by a fence composed of 20 bronze posts on the longer side, and these posts had fine twisted linen that was 7.5' high and they were held by silver hooks. The shorter western and eastern side of the fence had 10 bronze posts with the eastern side having four middle posts that held a screen-like gate of special embroidery and that's where people would enter.

Now, the daily worship required many priests. Some would inspect the animals that you would bring to the gate to make sure that they were appropriate; others were in charge of the actual sacrifices at the altar; and others cared for the supplies involved in all of the worship, and here the Israelites would bring their sacrifices and their offerings. And

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within that inner court as you come in, the first thing that you would see is a large bronze altar. It was 7.5' x 7.5' and stood 4.5' off the ground. It was hollow. It was made out of a frame of acacia wood overlaid with bronze, and also it contained a bronze grate about halfway up the altar assembly because that was used for burnt sacrifices, both animal as well as meal sacrifices. And I might add that it had a wide ramp on one side so that it would allow the priest and the worshiper higher access if they needed it up to the altar, and according to Exodus 20:26, it had no steps lest man's nakedness be exposed. A very fascinating thought. You will recall that it was nakedness that caused Adam and Eve to first experience shame and become consciously aware of the hideous reality of sin, and ever since then, nakedness is really a way of disclosing sin, and any exposure of nakedness might, that would come from climbing the stairs and so forth, would therefore desecrate the altar of God. It shows you how serious God is about sin. You know, this might appear shocking to us in our culture where there is no shame, where most people have no moral compass, where immodesty and even nakedness are commonplace.

But upon the bronze altar, the worshiper would lift the live offering, they would bind it to the horns on the four corners of the altar, they would solemnly, the worshiper would solemnly lay their hands upon the head of the animal and then the priest would slit its throat and catch its blood in a basin and then pour it out around the altar. And the horns of the altar symbolized the power of God over life and over death and the violent slaughter of the innocent animal represented Christ who would one day be the innocent substitute who would die a violent death for our sins once and for all.

Next between the bronze altar and the tabernacle, stood a large shallow basin of water called the bronze laver and it was made up of bronze mirrors that were donated by the women. And there the priest would wash their hands and wash their feet before offering the sacrifices, and certainly before entering into the holy place lest they would die. God was very concerned about that. And the shiny mirrored surface of the laver would magnify the blood that is coming off of the hands and even off of the feet, giving the appearance of an infinite well of purification. And as the priest saw his image there, he would become acutely aware that God sees him personally and is able to peer beyond the external even into the heart. The washing pictured the cleansing work of Jesus Christ and how he cleanses us from sin, and also reminds us of his daily cleansing that is necessary for us to enjoy fellowship with him.

Beyond the bronze altar and the bronze laver, the worshiper would see then the 15' tall veil of the holy place where they could not enter. Only the priests could go in there. And it was divided into two sections. You have, first of all, the holy place which was 15' x 30', and behind that was the most holy place, or the Holy of Holies, that was 15 x 15. And the

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holy place really contained three objects: the golden lampstand, the table of the bread of the presence, and the altar of incense. Let me describe these to you.

As the priest entered the holy place, he could look over on his left and he could see the golden lampstand or it's called a menorah, a magnificent work of art. In fact, it was beaten from a single 75 pound piece of gold. Can you imagine that? With seven branches that would be filled with the purest of olive oil necessary to light the lamps. There were no candles on it. They had wicks in them but it was lit with olive oil and that was affixed to the top of each of the seven branches. Now, we don't know for sure but tradition indicates that the dimensions was about 5' high and about 3 ½' wide. And each lamp was basically a cup in the shape of an almond flower ready to bloom. Every day the priest would add oil to the lamps and they would trim the wicks because the light had to blaze forth every day and every night. And this light, of course, would reflect the golden objects in that dark room. It would reflect upon the beautiful embroidery of the curtains around it and certainly the veil separating the holy place from the most holy place. It would shine off of the magnificent cherubim on the wall coverings that would have been on the veil. It must have been an amazing sight to see all of that glowing there, creating an atmosphere of transcendence. And it would also cause the smoke from the incense from the altar of incense to be reflected.

So it would have been an amazing scene and all of this pictured Christ as the light of the world who is the very presence of God, who brought light and life to those who live in darkness, whose ministry consists of guiding us into the truth whereby we might be saved, where we might experience forgiveness, saving grace, eternal life. And all of that, of course, is pictured in the next room, the Holy of Holies. Today, by the way, and you can look this up on your internet. I've been there and seen this, some of you probably have as well. But today in Jerusalem's old city Jewish quarter overlooking the Temple Mount is a new golden menorah weighing half a ton. It contains 100 pounds of 24 karat gold and its estimated value is about \$3 million and this is the work of the Temple Institute. It is to be used in the new temple that they are wanting to build, that they are planning to build to the great consternation of the Muslims.

The second object in the holy place is the table of the bread of presence. It was also made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. It was 3' long, about 1 ½' wide, and 2 ¼' high. And the plates and the pitchers that held the bread and the drinks were all made of pure gold. There the priest would arrange the 12 loaves that were prepared, prepared bread that represented the 12 tribes of Israel. And bread, of course, is always the symbol in Scripture of that which gives and sustains life. And every Sabbath the priests would have to go in and take out the old bread. They would eat it and then they'd have to put in the new loaves. And this is another reminder, a visual reminder of God's covenant with Israel

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where God as God also promised to be their King that would provide for them, that would protect them if they kept his commandments. And I might also add in the culture of the Old Testament, covenants were sealed with a meal. A meal would formalize the relationship, the agreement, make it binding in a very personal way. And Jesus would later call himself the bread of life because he is the ultimate source of life, including eternal life. And it was during the Last Supper, the Lord's supper, that God sealed his covenant, his new covenant with his people.

Finally in the middle of the western end of the holy place stood the altar of incense. It was 1 ½' long, 1 ½' wide, and 3' high. Likewise, it was made of acacia wood overlaid with gold and this is where every morning and night the priest would burn a special recipe of incense that God required and the incense counteracted the odors arising from the animal sacrifices, but also on the day of atonement the high priest would fill a censer with this incense and then he would use it to enter into the most holy place, a beautiful picture of Christ interceding on our behalf. But the incense also prevented him from seeing the Shekinah glory of God hovering between the cherubim over the ark of the covenant and therefore it protected him from instant death. God's serious about his holiness, isn't he? Now, the symbolic function of the incense itself is always prayer, a visual reminder of Israel's faith, and like the pleasing aroma of the incense that ascended toward God in the holy place, likewise the prayers of God's people are a pleasing aroma to him as they ascend into his presence.

Now, behind the holy place is the most holy place so let's go there for a moment. This is where the high priest would enter only one time per year on Yom Kippur, the day of atonement. The most holy Place was separated from the holy place by a heavy 15 x 15' veil made of the finest twisted linen that was colored with very costly dye that was blue and scarlet and purple. The most holy place was separated from the holy place by this veil and it hung on four pillars of acacia wood by means of hooks, and embroidered upon the veil were representations of cherubim like the ones that God stationed outside the Garden of Eden. Remember after Adam and Eve sinned, God stationed them there to prevent anyone from coming back in to his holy presence contaminated with sin, and also to prevent them from partaking of the tree of life. God's presence, however, by now is no longer in the garden, it's in the tabernacle itself, and so the veil symbolized how sin prevents man from having access into the presence of God.

And, of course, in the most holy place, we see the ark of the covenant that contained the tablets of stone of the 10 Commandments, a jar of manna, and Aaron's rod. The ark was also made of acacia wood. It was overlaid with gold. It was 3'9" long, 2'3" wide and 2' high. And above the ark on each end were beautiful golden cherubs with outstretched wings guarding the holiness of God. And it was between the cherubs that the Shekinah

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glory, the presence of God glowed with ineffable light, too brilliant, too holy to be seen by fallen eyes.

But there was a lid on top of the ark that is very important for us to understand. That lid was a golden lid and it separated the law within the ark from the holy presence of God above the ark. And why is that the case? Because the law had been violated and God's holiness cannot be contaminated with sin. That is what is pictured there. The golden lid of separation has staggering implications that helps us understand why as sinners we can never enter into the presence of a holy God without being somehow reconciled, being at peace with him. And it was on that lid, dear friends, that divine justice and grace came together symbolically when the high priest would sprinkle the blood of an animal once per year for the atonement of the sins of Israel. That lid was called the mercy seat. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament translates that word "mercy seat" with the word "hilasterion," which means "the place of propitiation; the place of mercy," where the just wrath of God is symbolically propitiated; where God's fury over man's rebellion against him is temporarily appeased; where his anger was symbolically satisfied and his vengeance upon sinners placated. In Exodus 25, beginning in verse 21, we read this, "You shall put the mercy seat," that is, the hilasterion, "on top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony which I will give to you. There I will meet with you; and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony."

There is an amazing picture of this in the New Testament. In 1 John 4:10 John says this, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Propitiate there is the term again, "hilasmos" in the original language, a term that is seldom used outside of the Bible. You never hear people talking about propitiation. You know, people have no idea what that means but it means "to appease or to satisfy or to placate," and the point is this: because of God's great love for us, he sent his Son Jesus to be the propitiation, the appeasement, the placation, the satisfaction for our sins so that his wrath could be satisfied.

Now, perhaps you can better understand not only the symbolic structure of the tabernacle that I have gone over very very simplistically, but also, secondly, the symbolic service of the tabernacle, and this is where the writer of Hebrews goes next. Notice verse 6, he reminds them saying,

6 Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, 7 but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without

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taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance.

May I remind you that the high priest on the day of atonement would move methodically through all that God had prescribed for him. We see this detailed, for example, in Leviticus 16. He would begin the morning as usual by making a sacrifice, a burnt offering of a one year old lamb, his own sacrifice, and then Aaron was required to remove his normal priestly garments. He would have to wash and then he would put on the special garments that God had prescribed for him in order to perform the sacrifices which would ultimately take him into the Holy of Holies, and this included the breastplate that covered his heart signifying that he would carry the people and their sins in his heart into the presence of God. It also included the ephod that hung around his shoulder which was basically an apron that represented the 12 tribes of Israel and also represented the fact that he had power on their behalf. And then he would secure the necessary sacrificial animals. He had to have a bull for his own sin offering and two male goats for the people's sin offering. He had to have two rams, one for Aaron's and the other for the people's burnt offering. Next he would slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. By the way, before he got to the time of atonement, it is estimated that he would have slaughtered 22 different animals. Before entering into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the bull, Aaron had to create a cloud of incense in the Holy of Holies that I described earlier. He would then go in through the veil and go into the presence of God and then to enter into the Holy of Holies, we know that he had to pass through three areas in the tabernacle, later the temple. He took the blood and went through the door of the outer court and then through another door into the holy place and finally he would disappear into the Holy of Holies, and once there he had to make his sacrifice very quickly. There was no place to sit. He had to do it quickly, do it appropriately, and then get out. And once inside, he would take some of the blood of the bull and sprinkle it upon the mercy seat seven times, that place of propitiation and, again, there the justice of God would be temporarily appeased because all sin must be punished, there atonement was made for the sins of the people.

Then lots were cast for two goats to determine which one would be slaughtered and which one would be the scapegoat that would be driven away and loosed into the wilderness. The goat for slaughter, the goat of the people's sin offering would then be sacrificed and it was taken into the holy place and applied to the mercy seat as the blood of the bull had been. And then cleansing was made for the holy place and we believe this was by sprinkling blood of both the bull and the goat. And the entire ceremony of the atonement, of the holy place, was done alone. No one was there with him to watch or to help.

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Then next, outside the tent, Aaron was to make atonement for the altar of burnt offering using the blood of both the bull and the goat, and then the second goat which had been kept alive, had the sins of the people of the nation symbolically laid upon its head and it was driven outside of the camp far away, hopefully to a desolate place so it would never return.

Then Aaron would enter once again into the tent of meeting. He would remove his linen garments. He would wash, put on his normal priestly garments and then the burnt offerings of rams, one for Aaron and his family and the other for the people, would be offered. When the earlier sacrifices of the bull and the goat were completed, the fat of the sin offering was then burned on the altar and the remains of the bull and the goat were taken outside the camp and there they were burned and those who had been rendered unclean by the handling of the animals on which the sins of Aaron and the people were laid, were to themselves wash very carefully before they could even return into the camp.

Now, folks, this happened on the day of atonement year after year after year. Do you get the picture? In all of this, the high priest of Christ is symbolized. All of this foreshadowed and anticipated a greater, a more permanent cleansing of God's people and of his dwelling place which would be accomplished by a better priest and a better sacrifice. Moreover, like those priests, our glorious Savior continues his high priestly work on our behalf. Do you realize that? He is constantly enlightening and feeding and interceding on our behalf.

So as we come back to the text, where is the writer of Hebrews going with all of this? Well, notice verse 8. He begins to help us understand. He says,

8 The Holy Spirit is signifying this, [in other words this is what he's trying to communicate] that the way into the holy place [in other words to have access to God] has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, 9 which is a symbol for the present time.

Now, I think you see this. The Israelites could not enter into the holy place, much less go into the most holy place, only the priest could do that. So this meant that the people were never fully cleansed of their sin despite these endless sacrifices. Folks, imagine how burdensome it would have been to have lived in those days, to live under that system, constantly making sacrifices for sin to remove the immediate temporal judgment of God, but knowing that none of it would ever allow you to enter into the presence of God because what you're doing would never fully deliver you from sin, nor would it ever fully deliver you from the accompanying guilt that ate away at your conscience. Instead all that you're doing is a perpetual reminder of the inadequacies of the whole system. They knew that their next sin would require yet another sacrifice, and yet it would be powerless to

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remove that sin and purify their guilty conscience, and they knew that those sacrifices would never be able to change their sinful inner nature. They could never, as Hebrews 10:1 says, make perfect those who draw near. Imagine living like that. However, now catch this because this is the heart of the writer's argument, this was God's plan. Exposing all these imperfections without ever remedying them was the very purpose of the law in the old covenant system. That's why he did it.

Verse 9, it "is a symbol for the present time." "Symbol" in Greek is "parabole." We get our word "parable" from that. It means "setting side-by-side something for the purpose of comparison." So the old covenant of Judaism only symbolized cleansing and access. It never accomplished it. It was never intended to do so. Only the substitutionary atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ is capable of doing all that that pictured. That's the point. No wonder Paul wrote to those cultured Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him," what? "Crucified." That's the heart of it all. And how sad to see churches today shy away from that most fundamental truth because it might offend somebody. Folks, the death of Christ became the great and the final sacrifice that has forever accomplished what millions of sacrifices never could.

Now, on a very practical note, learning about the Mosaic law that we are doing here should really overwhelm us with a couple of fundamental truths. It should overwhelm us with the reality that God hates sin. That's pretty obvious, right? And it should also help us see that God in his great love has made provision for the remedy of sin, to remove sin through faith in Christ. This is the great truth of the Gospel and hopefully those things are precious to your soul. By the way, there is a way of determining that right now. Let me give you a litmus test to see if these fundamental truths are truths that you really truly embrace. If you understand these things, do you know what will happen? You will have a great love for Christ and a zeal for his glory. Do you have that? I hope you do. If your conscience doesn't affirm this as being an accurate description of your heart, then you are either unsaved or you have a very low view of sin and a low view of God and a very high view of yourself because as we look at all this we can see how holy God is, how he hates sin, and yet in his infinite love and grace, he has provided a way for us to gain access into his presence.

You see, the one thing that the sacrificial system did extremely well by God's design is to overwhelm the people constantly with the fact that God hates sin and he has provided at least a temporary way of removing it. And yet, folks, we have Christ, right? We have Christ, the perfect and final sacrifice and yet many believers today have very little love for Christ. They are like the Ephesians who left their first love for Christ. They became complacent in their love for Christ. You know, in our culture it reinforces the tolerance of sin. We can become that way very very easily and lose our love for Christ and just kind of

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leave it aside and let it be replaced with other things and have no zeal for his glory. Folks, do you realize that the great longing of the Old Testament saints, the great passion of their heart was to be forever and finally cleansed from sin so that they could enter into the presence of God, so they could have access to his glory, something that the old system could never do. So, folks, if you're a complacent Christian and you have very little love for Christ and zeal for his glory, I would challenge you to wake up and to look afresh at God's mercy and his grace as it has been extended to you through faith in Christ.

The writer goes on to underscore another very important God-ordained imperfection of the old covenant. Notice in verse 9 he says,

Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, 10 since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

By the way, the word "reformation" means "to make straight; to correct; to make right; to reform," a reference to the superior new covenant that could do what the old covenant could not do. So God ordained the old system to be incomplete, to be inadequate, to be temporary, and to therefore point to Christ and the new covenant that would be the reformation.

Now, back to verse 9. The old covenant, notice, it could not make the worshiper perfect in conscience. That's a fascinating statement, isn't it? In other words, the gnawing guilt of sin could not be eradicated. That guilty conscience because of sin could not be eradicated because the guilt itself had not been eradicated, it had not yet been placed upon Christ. Ultimately it was and we can enjoy that today.

Notice verse 11, he goes on to describe this.

11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; [obviously it's a reference to heaven, the dwelling place of God] 12 and [speaking of Christ Jesus, he entered] not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal

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Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

As a footnote, the ashes of a heifer, of a red heifer were used to purify a person who had come in contact with a corpse. So what he's saying is, if all of these things cleansed at some level, how much more the blood of Christ? This is such a blessed truth, isn't it? It's such a blessed truth that Christ's sacrifice has brought us not only forgiveness, not only imputed righteousness, not only access to God, but also a clear conscience, something that the Old Testament saints could never experience. It's easy to take that for granted, isn't it? They constantly struggled with the guilt of sin.

Notice in chapter 10, the first two verses, "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins?" You see, folks, because their sins were never permanently removed, the guilt remained. That's the issue.

So what do you do? More sacrifices. More sacrifices to only cover sin temporarily. But how different it is for those of us who are in Christ. He took our guilt and gave us his righteousness therefore there is now no condemnation. I don't know about you, but that does wonders to my conscience. Oh yes, I know I still sin. I get that. And when I am unrepentant, I need to feel legitimate guilt over my sin. That's appropriate. My conscience needs to be wounded. But boy, where there is genuine repentance, oh, what a wonderful thing to know that Christ took all of that. Can you imagine how hard it would have been to have lived without grace, to bear the guilt of past sins, to bear the guilt of current sins, of unknown sins. You know, we only see a tip of the iceberg. They knew that. Always wondering if the Judge of heaven and earth is going to one day come down on you. What a terrible thing.

You know, and I've also discovered that the more personally I become aware of the holiness of God, the more I see my own sin. Have you noticed that? The more I grow in Christ, the more I see it. Oh, and I don't like what I see. The more acutely aware I become of my own sin, the more I feel guilt but because of the precious blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sin, my conscience is put at ease. It's as though the Spirit of God whispers oh so gently, "Dave, repent. Relax and rejoice. There is no condemnation. You have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ. You now have his righteousness, the righteousness of the one who was made a curse for you. He bore your guilt and shame." Hebrews 10 later on will speak of this, beginning in verse 19, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living

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way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us," do something. What is that? "Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." What a blessed truth.

So back to verse 14. The blood of Christ has cleansed our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Now, what are dead works? Well, it refers to all of those things that do not honor and serve God. God wants a living sacrifice. That's why they never brought fish to be sacrificed because the fish would die. It had to be a living sacrifice. That's what he wants from us, a living sacrifice. Dead works would include those religious things that we do that are self-serving, self-promoting, that are not done out of a heart of love for God; those formal, empty, ritualistic observances that are really intended to impress man and hopefully impress God. We are cleansed from all of that stuff.

And folks, what we need to realize here is that we are created to serve the living God. Can I say that again? We have been created to serve the living God, not ourselves but the living God. And I might add, we will never be happy unless we do so. Therefore if you are here today and you are unhappy, you're sad, you're sour, you're sullen, guess what? It's because you are not serving the living God, because when you are serving the living God, you are going to enjoy the fullness of his presence in your life. And how easy it is for us to get out of fellowship with him and to forfeit that soul-satisfying joy of his presence and his power in our life and we start pursuing things that we think are going to bring satisfaction but they only do so temporarily, right?

Now, please understand the guilt of an accusing conscience is a blessed thing if you are living in unrepentant sin. It's a gift that God has given us. It's God's way of warning us. It's like those little warning icons that appear on the dashboard of your vehicle. We had one the other day. It was a red picture. I'm glad they are red so it stands out. It's a red picture of an engine. That's the one you don't want to see. Basically what that says is, "Get this fixed or you will wish you had." That's what the conscience does, "Get this fixed or you will wish you had." This is what an accusing conscience will do when we have unrepentant sin and do you know what? The more we inform our conscience of God's standard of righteousness, the more sensitive it will be to warn us of those things that would be dishonoring to him, and the more aroused it will be with a legitimate sense of guilt when we pursue those things that are in rebellion against him. Therefore the more we violate our conscience, the more we will end up silencing it. That's why you have people today, sometimes even people in the church, that can sin with impunity and it doesn't bother them. What a tragic thing.

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But folks, think about this, we all sin, right? We all at times dishonor God with dead works. And as I said earlier, what we see with our sin is just the tip of the iceberg, and most of the time we're not all that concerned with what we see, right? So what about all of the rest of it? Well, here's the good news of the Gospel: the blood of Christ has cleansed our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. This is the power of Christ in the Gospel and because of Christ, one day we are going to be able to serve him perfectly. Boy, I long for that day. So remember as we see here, Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, he entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is to say not of this creation. He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption and, folks, here's what's absolutely staggering, think about this: because we are united to Christ through faith by his grace, because our citizenship is in heaven, Philippians 3:20, guess what? We have already been transported into the Father's presence in glory. Do you realize that? You say, "Well, wait a minute. We're sitting here right now." Oh yeah. Yeah, it hasn't fully happened yet but what's interesting, according to Ephesians 2:4 and 6, that promise is so absolute it is as if it has already happened. Do you know what Paul says in Ephesians 2, beginning in verse 4, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Notice it doesn't say "and he will seat us," he says, "and seated us." It's past tense, emphasizing the absoluteness of the promise by speaking of it as if it has already fully come to fruition.

Folks, the old covenant could never do any of that, only the new covenant, only Christ can do that. And although we have not yet experienced the full blessing of our inheritance that God has for us in Christ, he has already delivered us from the domain of darkness, right? He has transferred us into the kingdom of light of his dear Son. He is taking us out of darkness and death and he has placed us into the sphere of spiritual light and spiritual life, eternal life, all because of what Christ has done. So these are the great truths. We have actually entered into the Holy of Holies which is no longer in a tabernacle, it's no longer in a temple, it is in the heavenly, majestic, glorious presence of our God and one day we will experience the fullness of that blessing. What an amazing truth.

Let me close with some practical application. I want you to just ask yourself: where am I serving the living God? You don't have to answer that right now but I want you to think about that. In fact, because I know that you will be hopelessly biased in your own favor, ask it this way: what would God say about that question? How would God answer that in terms of where am I serving you? Ask the question: am I presenting my body as a living and a holy sacrifice acceptable to God, Romans 12:1? Which is my spiritual service of

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worship? Or Romans 12:2, am I being conformed into the likeness of this world without me even realizing it's happening?

And here are three things that I would encourage you to do, real practically, and I know at least two of you will do this. I am praying for more than that but wouldn't it be great if at least two or four, maybe six would do this? Three things: take inventory of where you spend your time and your treasure. For a lot of you, you'll find that most of your time is spent watching television, messing around on Facebook, playing with your cell phone, and so forth. Then you'll look at how you spend your money. Most of it is spent on things other than investing in the kingdom. So take inventory. Your calendar and your checkbook will reveal your priorities as you think about serving the living God. Secondly, set aside some time every day to ask the Spirit of God through his word, obviously your Bible needs to be open, and through other means that he will provide, ask him where you need to repent and where you need to reprioritize your life. And then finally, this is very important: share these things with your spouse, somebody that is close to you, a close friend, and ask them to pray for you. Ask them to encourage you so that you can perhaps change the trajectory of your life so that you will serve him more faithfully.

Folks, this is why this is so important, real practical but so important: the more we serve the living God, the more we honor the one who has made it possible, and the more we honor him, the more he will enable us to experience freedom from guilt and the joy that is ours when we are able to draw near to him in intimate fellowship. That's what I want for you. That's what I want for me. And do you know what? This is what God wants for each of us. This is why he created us. This is why he sent his Son, so that we could enjoy sweet fellowship with him and live for his glory.

So folks, make this a priority in your life and develop a strategy to make it happen. Develop a strategy to make it happen. I guess that's a fourth point, so add that. Learn to discipline yourself for the sake of godliness and watch what God will do.

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Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths that are so precious. Frankly, Lord, when we think of them, they are beyond our capacity to fully grasp. We see things in our mind and in our imagination but, Lord, the fullness of it, oh my, what awaits us in glory is just unimaginable and so we give you praise. And I ask that you will minister to each one of us as we endeavor to understand more of how these great truths apply to our lives so that we can live them out in serving the living God which is really at the core of worship. So, Lord, I commit these things to you and I pray for those that may not know you as Savior. May today be the day that they see the hideous nature of their sin but the glorious truth of the Gospel and by your grace will you draw them unto yourself that they too might be saved? I ask all of this in the precious name of Jesus and for his sake. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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